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Test-taking attitudes and skills

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Published in:
European Journal of Psychological Assessment

Publication date:
1996

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
van de Vijver, F. J. R. (1996). Test-taking attitudes and skills. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 12(1), 239-239.

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ITC Bulletin

Test-Taking Attitudes and Skills

If a mental test is administered, the performance is interpreted in terms of the construct the instrument is taken to measure. A score on an intelligence test is interpreted in terms of the underlying construct. However, mental test scores are susceptible to various other influences which may impede a straightforward interpretation. Such influences may be transient such as fatigue while others are more stable. A simple demonstration of the latter is provided by the observation that retesting tends to give rise to higher scores. As another example, multiple choice testing is not infrequently seen by testees as a test on which you have 'to outsmart the test designer.' Part of the procedure to get a driver license in the Netherlands is a multiple-choice examination testing knowledge of traffic rules. When I had to do the test, the instructor said to me: "If you do not know the answer, mark the longest alternative." Such strategies to derive the correct answer from formal item characteristics are widely used in multiple choice testing. Even though the literature on test-taking attitudes and skills unambiguously points out their relevance, the practical impact has remained limited. The role of test-taking attitudes and skills is marginal: we acknowledge their relevance but we are well aware of the problems associated with any attempts to address these. It is remarkable that some motivational factors such as achievement motivation and test anxiety have enjoyed much interest by researchers. Attempts to develop a more comprehensive framework to describe

noncognitive factors in assessment have not been numerous.

The current issue of the *ITC Bulletin* contains two contributions on test taking attitudes and skills. Oakland, Gulek, and Glutting describe noncognitive factors. After a review of the literature they describe the developments of the Guide to the Assessment of Test Session Behavior (GATSB), an instrument to assess test-taking attitudes. The instrument has been applied in various studies and has shown a good reliability and validity. The second part of the manuscript contains an example of a study of the GATSB among Turkish children. The authors find that 20% of the variance in children's IQ scores is associated with their test-taking behaviors.

Rogers and Yang consider test-wiseness. They define the concept as the derivation of knowledge about the correct answer on the basis of formal item characteristics such as sentence length of the response alternatives. The authors review the literature and present a model of test-wiseness. They also describe ways to minimize the effects of test-wiseness.

The interest in test-taking attitudes and skills has been waxing and waning in the past. In recent years there has not been attention in the literature for this topic. Hopefully, the present issue will help to bring test-taking skills and attitudes to a more central place in the assessment literature.

Fons van de Vijver, Editor